

Dear Mr. Tauzin:

During the public meeting of the Mississippi River Commission held in Houma, Louisiana, on August 23, 2002, you commented on several of the more pressing problems facing south Louisiana.

As you discussed, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New Orleans District, has implemented two notable environmental enhancement projects, the Caernarvon and Davis Pond Freshwater Diversions. The current operational plan for the Caernarvon Freshwater Diversion structure has produced excellent results. Monitoring of the project since 1988 by the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources, Coastal Restoration Division, has shown that the project has enhanced emergent marsh vegetation, reduced marsh loss, and significantly increased commercial and recreational fisheries and wildlife productivity. Monitoring data show that freshwater marsh plants increased over seven times, brackish marsh plants increased by almost 50 percent since operation of the structure began, and the amount of salt marsh vegetation has decreased by more than half. Caernarvon has helped to reduce marsh loss as well. Results show a net increase in marshland of about 5.9 percent per year. The Davis Pond Freshwater Diversion project was dedicated on March 26, 2002. Diversions began July 17, 2002, once all oyster leases were relocated or purchased. Positive results similar to those for the Caernarvon project are expected. The Commission realizes the importance of efforts like these and will continue to support these types of projects as directed by Congress.

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The Commission is encouraged by the degree of support for the Morganza to the Gulf of Mexico project, evidenced by the passage of a \$3.6 million local tax issue by the voters of Terrebonne Parish. The Morganza to the Gulf of Mexico Feasibility Study is complete. The Chief of Engineers' report was signed on August 23, 2002. The National Economic Development plan providing a 100-year level of protection has been selected as the recommended plan. The Pre-construction Engineering and Design (PED) phase for levees and floodgates is underway. The first construction contract is scheduled for award in Fiscal Year 2005, pending Congressional authorization,

appropriation of funds for construction, and execution of a Project Cooperation Agreement.

The PED phase for the Houma Navigation Canal Lock is underway and is scheduled for completion by June 2004. Besides permitting navigation in the Houma Navigation Canal, the lock will also prevent saltwater intrusion to preserve the freshwater supply for the city of Houma.

Work on the Donaldsonville to the Gulf of Mexico study is progressing at a good pace. The depth-damage survey is ongoing. Sponsor Architect/Engineer firms are obtaining rights-of-entry for the hurricane levee alignment and hydraulic surveys. Surveys are expected to be completed in 3 to 4 months. Design work will start when the surveys are available. The cooperation provided by the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development and Lafourche Basin Levee District is appreciated.

The New Orleans District, in conjunction with the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources as the sponsor, is currently completing feasibility studies for two component projects of the Louisiana Coastal Area Comprehensive Plan. Draft feasibility reports for the Barataria Basin Wetland Creation and Restoration Study and the Barataria Basin Barrier Shoreline Restoration are nearing completion, and the final reports will be finished on a schedule that will allow these projects to be considered for authorization in a potential 2004 Water Resources Development Act.

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The Commission recognizes the key role played by the Louisiana Congressional delegation in support of our Corps projects. We appreciate receiving your comments and look forward to hearing from you at our future public meetings.

Sincerely,

Don T. Riley

Brigadier General, U. S. Army
President Designee, Mississippi
River Commission